

Discussion Guide for
The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind
by Mark A. Noll

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Preface (2022)

1. In the first paragraph, Noll claims “Events of recent years” convinced him of the usefulness of “saying something more” (ix) in this edition. In your estimation, to what events was Noll referring? In what way(s), if any, have you grappled with those same events?
2. Noll believes an “extraordinary breadth of support” exists for Christian institutions of higher learning (xi). Do you agree? If so, why? Disagree? If so, why?
3. How does Noll define evangelicalism? How do you define evangelicalism? In what way(s), if any, are those understandings similar? Different?
4. In Noll’s estimation, what qualities define public intellectuals amongst evangelicals? Do you think your graduate education and/or ongoing professional development programs where you serve

adequately prepare you to serve as a public intellectual? If so, why? If not, why not?

5. In your estimation, in what way(s), if any, should politics serve science? Science serve politics? How do you theologically make sense of the relationship the two share?

Preface (1994)

1. Noll refers to his book as an “epistle from a wounded lover” (xvi). What is your estimate of the wounds Noll incurred? What is your assessment of the loves he harbors? In what way(s), if any, have you incurred comparable wounds? Share comparable loves?
2. While the thought that “it is simply impossible to be, with integrity, both evangelical and intellectual” crossed Noll’s mind, he dismissed it. For what reason, did he do so? Has a comparable thought crossed your mind? In what way(s), if any, have you dismissed it? Embraced it?
3. Noll dedicated this book to his colleagues at Wheaton College with whom he fought the fights and inflicted the wounds “that are the subject of this book” (xvi). When it comes to the evangelical life of the mind, how would the relationship you share with your colleagues compare?

Chapter One

The Contemporary Scandal

1. Noll opens by arguing that despite the ways evangelicals nourished millions of believers, they “have largely abandoned the universities, the arts, and other realms of ‘high’ culture” (3). In what way(s) does your own personal experience incline you to agree with his claim? Disagree with his claim?
2. Noll contends no “single research university or a single periodical devoted to in-depth interaction with modern culture” exists (4). In your estimation, is such a university necessary? If so, why? If not, why not? In your estimation, is such a periodical necessary? If so, why? If not, why not?
3. How does Noll define the life of the mind? What is your assessment of his definition? Implicit or explicit, how does his definition compare with the one in place where you serve?
4. In order to understand the scandal of the evangelical mind, one must understand the three aspects defining it—cultural, institutional, and

theological. In your estimation, which one, if any, of those aspects is more challenging? Why? Less challenging? Why?

5. Echoing Charles Malik, Noll believes “fidelity to Jesus Christ demands from evangelicals a more responsible intellectual existence than we have practiced throughout much of our history” (27). In your estimation, what, if anything, does fidelity to Christ have to do with a responsible intellectual existence? In terms of concrete practices?

Chapter Two

Why the Scandal Matters

1. When opening chapter two, Noll argues the reason the scandal of the evangelical mind matters is “the comprehensive reality of Christianity itself demands specifically Christian consideration of the world we inhabit, whether that consideration is of social theory, the history of science, other historical changes, the body, the arts, literature, or more” (29). In what way(s) do you think Noll’s argument is sufficient? Insufficient?
2. Noll is clear in asserting that rectifying the scandal has nothing to do with academic respectability. In what way(s), if any, are academics susceptible to the lure of respectability? How would such a pursuit foster a scandal of a different kind?
3. On page 31, Noll notes, “Evangelical culture in America has run to antagonistic polarities.” Of the polarities Noll goes on to list, with which ones, if any, do you struggle with the most? Why? With which ones, if any, does the culture where you serve struggle the most?

4. A key part of the reason why the scandal matters, Noll argues, is “When we study something, we are of course learning about that thing” (49). How would such an understanding make a difference in the practice of teaching? The practice of research?

5. Conceding “basic intellectual operations” to the modern research university, Noll notes, beckons the heretical temptations of Manichaeism, Gnosticism, and Docetism (51). In what ways, if any, is such a concession, if at all, implicitly or explicitly woven into your approach to teaching? Your approach to research? The approach to teaching which informs the culture where you serve? The approach to research that informs the culture where you serve?

Chapter Three

The Evangelical Mind Takes Shape— Revival, Revolution, and a Cultural Synthesis

1. In what way(s) does an emphasis on revivalism hamper a focus on the life of the mind amongst evangelicals? In what ways can such evangelicals give both revivalism and the life of the mind their just due?
2. The relationship shared by revivalism and the disestablishment of the Church in the United States produced a pronounced “dynamism” when it came to “fulfilling the Great Commission” (66). In what ways does the practicality that dynamism fostered pose challenges to the evangelical life of the mind? In what way(s), if any, does that dynamism inform your practice of teaching? Your practice of research? In what way(s), if any, does that dynamism inform the practice of teaching where you serve? The practice of research where you serve?
3. In what way(s), if any, can the evangelical life of the mind enhance what is best about the culture of the United States without being

captivated by that culture? What lessons does history offer as cautionary tales? As points of inspiration?

4. According to Noll, what lessons can present-day evangelical scholars learn from Jonathan Edwards? How can those lessons inform your practice of teaching? Your practice of research?

5. Who, if anyone, serves as an example to your particular practice of teaching? Your particular practice of research? At what regular points in time, if any, do you reflect upon the distinctively Christian nature of your practice of teaching? Upon the distinctively Christian nature of your practice of research? At what regular points in time, if any, does the culture where you serve pause to reflect upon the distinctively Christian nature of the practice of teaching it fosters? Upon the distinctively Christian nature of the practice of research it fosters?

Chapter Four

The Evangelical Enlightenment

1. Noll opens chapter four by arguing the evangelical enlightenment fostered “habits of mind that the evangelical Enlightenment encouraged have continued to influence contemporary evangelical life” (82). What, in particular, were those habits of mind? In what way(s), if at all, are those habits reflected in how you understand yourself? In what way(s), if at all, are those habits reflected in how the culture where you serve understands itself?
2. How would you summarize the legacy of Scottish Common Sense Realism? How would your estimation of its intellectual legacy be similar to Noll’s assessment? Different from Noll’s assessment?
3. Noll argues that the prominence of “Bible-onlyism” came “at the expense of well-articulated theology” (106). What forces does Noll point to as being responsible for that challenge? How can Scripture be viewed as the highest point of revelation while still playing its proper role in the development of theological systems that order intellectual inquiry? The results of that inquiry? The results of that inquiry during times of great social change?

4. How, if at all, do you see your present approach to Scripture being a descendent of the movements Noll presents toward the end of chapter four? How, if at all, do you see the present approach to Scripture fostered by the culture where you serve being a descendent of the movements Noll presents toward the end of chapter four?

5. In your estimation, are you adequately prepared to approach Scripture as the highest form of revelation in terms of how it may inform your teaching? Your research? If so, what insights would you share with your colleagues? If not, how can the professional development practices offered by the culture where you serve be of greater assistance to you? Be of greater assistance to your colleagues?

6. In your estimation, are you adequately prepared to draw upon Scripture as a means of developing theological systems that can inform your teaching? That can inform your research? If so, what insights would you share with your colleagues? If not, how can the professional development practices offered by the culture where you serve be of assistance?

Chapter Five

The Intellectual Disaster of Fundamentalism

1. According to Noll, many universities in the United States experienced an intellectual and, in turn, organizational transformation between the close of the Civil War and approximately 1910. In your estimation, how, if at all, was that transformation positive? Negative? In what ways did that transformation inform today's university?
2. According to Noll, what conditions fostered the rise of religious fundamentalism? What, if anything, does fundamentalism have in common with the conditions that fostered its rise?
3. Noll refers to dispensational premillennialism, along with the Holiness movement and Pentecostalism, as theological innovations. In what way(s), if any, did those innovations negatively influence the life of the mind? Positively influence the life of the mind?
4. What relationship did populism and anti-intellectualism come to share during the years Noll details in this chapter? In what way(s),

if any, is that relationship similar to the one present in evangelicalism today? Different from the one present in evangelicalism today?

5. If a variant form of the relationship forged by populism and anti-intellectualism exists today, what lessons do public intellectuals need to keep in mind when serving the church? When serving the public to which the church is also called to serve?

Chapter Six

Political Reflection

1. In Noll's estimation, "The character of American evangelical thinking is especially well illustrated in politics and science" (149). From your experience in academe, in what way(s), if any, has that assertion proven true? Proven false? From your experience beyond academe, in what way(s), if any, has that assertion proven true? Proven false?
2. Noll contends the life and thought of William Jennings Bryan offers a "baseline" for considering evangelical thought more generally in the twentieth century" (151). What is your assessment of that claim? In particular, in what way(s), if any, is Bryan's legacy reflected in evangelical thought to this day?
3. What does Noll believe is gained by comparing how Pope Leo XIII and Bryan addressed "the grievances suffered by ordinary people" as a result of the economic realities those people faced (154)? In particular, what lessons does he believe scholars can learn from them? In terms of engagement with the public within academe? In terms of engagement with the public beyond academe?

4. In what ways does Noll think both style and content are important considerations for scholars when interacting within academe? When interacting beyond academe? What is your assessment of his claim? In what way(s), if any, does such an argument influence your practice of teaching? Your practice of research? The culture where you serve?

Chapter Seven

Thinking about Science

1. In what ways does Noll believe the engagement by American evangelicals with Darwinism proved sufficient? Insufficient? Set trajectories for points of engagement by evangelicals with other scientific theories?
2. To some evangelicals, what is the appeal of creation science? In what way(s), if any, is that appeal explicable? In what way(s), if any, is that appeal inexplicable? For evangelical scholars within the natural sciences, what does Noll believe are lessons worth learning about working with evangelicals for whom creation science is appealing? For evangelical scholars beyond the natural sciences?
3. What damage does Noll believe creation science has done to the evangelical mind within the natural sciences? Beyond the natural sciences? What damage, if any, do you believe creation science has done to the evangelical mind within the natural sciences? Beyond the natural sciences? In what way(s), if any, are your views comparable to Noll's views? Different from Noll's views?

4. According to Noll, what impact did creation science have on how some evangelicals read the creation narratives in the book of Genesis? Read the Bible as a whole? Understand the role the Bible plays in the development of theological systems?

Chapter Eight

Is an Evangelical Intellectual Renaissance Underway?

1. Noll contends, “From the perspective of 1930, the evangelical mind was nearly dead” (213). From that perspective, would you agree with that assessment? If so, why? Disagree with that assessment? If so, why?
2. To what groups does Noll point as contributing hope to the possibility of awakening the evangelical mind? What groups, if any, do you believe were more important to the cultivation of such a form of hope than the others? Why? In your estimation, do any of those groups offer a form of hope that proves longer lasting than others? More broad in appeal than others?
3. Noll contends, “The most visible figure in reawakening a concern for social and political thought [within evangelicalism] was Carl F. H. Henry” (223). Who was Henry? What motivated him? What defined his thinking? What were his contributions? Do you agree with Noll’s assertion? If so, why? Disagree with Noll’s assertion? If so, why? In your estimation, what, if anything, do you think is instructive about

Henry's legacy for today's generation of evangelicals? Today's generation of evangelical scholars?

4. In Noll's estimation, in what fields did the awakening of the evangelical mind first occur? In your estimation, in what fields has that awakening made the greatest progress? Made the least progress? In what way(s), if any, can lessons from disciplines beyond your own be of service to your practice of teaching? To your practice of research?

5. In what ways does Noll suggest the evangelical mind can be nurtured by other Christian traditions (for example, Catholicism and Orthodox)? In what way(s), if any, do you think your practice of teaching can be nurtured by resources from those traditions? Relationships with adherents from those traditions? In what way(s), if any, do you think your practice of research can be nurtured by resources from those traditions? Relationships with adherents from those traditions?

Chapter Nine

Can the Scandal Be Scandalized?

1. When noting the presences of false disjunctions, Noll argues, “The cultivation of the mind for Christian reasons does not deny the appropriateness of activism, for example, but it does require activism to make room for study” (247). In general, how do you think activism can make room for study? In particular, how do you think activism can make room for study in your particular area(s) of inquiry?
2. What does Noll mean by intuitionism? In what way(s) does he argue intuitionism poses a challenge to the cultivation of the evangelical life of the mind? In your opinion, what practices, if any, can address the challenge posed by intuitionism?
3. In what way(s), if any, is one’s participation in corporate spiritual practices important to the cultivation of the evangelical life of the mind? In what way(s), if any, is one’s participation in individual spiritual practices important to the cultivation of the evangelical life of the mind?

4. Noll contends “The effort to think like a Christian is rather an effort to take seriously the sovereignty of God over the world he created, the lordship of Christ over the world he died to redeem, and the power of the Holy Spirit over the world he sustains each and every moment” (255–56). In what way(s), if any, does such a conviction inform your practice of teaching? Your practice of research? In what way(s), if any, does such a conviction inform the culture where you serve? Your culture’s approach to teaching? Your culture’s approach to research?

Afterword (2022)

1. In what way(s), if any, has your definition (however implicit or explicit) of evangelicalism changed while reading Noll's book? In what way(s), if any, has reading this book helped you think about the audience you serve? Within academe? Beyond academe?
2. Noll contends the life of the mind, in general, and the evangelical mind, in particular, is complicated by the present political culture and specialization. In what way(s), if any, have you adjusted your practice of teaching to contend with those complications? Your practice of research? What advice would you offer your colleagues (non-Christians and Christians alike)?
3. Noll notes scholarship by evangelicals is present today in ways that would not have been the case "less than a half-century ago" (267). After surveying the list of works on pages 267–68, were you more optimistic about your own research? If so, in what way(s)? Less optimistic about your own research? If so, in what way(s)?

4. Noll concludes his volume by arguing that the scandal of the evangelical mind “will come as believers undertake unembarrassed, unencumbered study of the world and all that is in it” (270). Looking ahead, what is your assessment of that argument? In what way(s), if any, does it influence your practice of teaching? Your practice of research?